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Nigeria at 60: A Contextual Appraisal of the Undergirding Philosophies of the Country's Foreign Policy Manoeuvres (1960 to 2020)

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Abstract

The vital and secondary interests of a state put together form the foundation on which the foreign policy of a nation is formulated. An ideal foreign policy is a collection of carefully chosen national interests in which some interests have been shifted, then properly prioritized and budgeted for in line with the power and potential of the state to achieve them. For Nigeria, the “Balewa Doctrine” pronounced by the country’s first and only Prime Minister in 1960 laid the foundations that have guided the country’s foreign policy objectives and principles over the years. With the address of the Prime Minister, Africa was made the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy, an objective that has remained constant despite several regime changes. Against this backdrop, this study

examines the historical and philosophical foundations of Nigeria's foreign policy engagements since her independence in 1960. It further engages the interaction between regime types and leadership orientation to elucidate Nigeria's commitment to the Afrocentric foreign policy principle. Through textual criticism and thematic content analysis, findings indicate that in the past 60 years of independence, there have been continuities and discontinuities in the country's Africa foreign policy. Nigeria has remained consistent in its focus on the welfare of sister African states while showing inconsistencies in the strategies, philosophies and interpretation of its goals. It is hoped that through citizen diplomacy, the government and masses can work in synergy to mitigate the political, security and ethnic tensions that have bedevilled the country over the years and provide a sustainable means of survival for Nigerians at home and abroad.

Keywords: *Afrocentrism, foreign policy, national interest, policymaking*

Introduction

Broadly speaking, there are domestic and external factors that influence a country's foreign policy formulation. These are also known as centripetal and centrifugal forces. These forces influence the degree of applicability of the federal concept within any polity. The centripetal forces are those influences within a federal state that pull towards the middle or necessitate the need for a federal system. In the case of Nigeria, we have ethnic diversity and economic gains. Conversely, the centrifugal forces are those which tend to pull apart. For Nigeria, these include the size of the federating units, military rule, and economic development (Awa, 1976, cited in Bassey, 2014). The centripetal factors that influence Nigeria's foreign policy are concentric in nature and derived from national interest. Principal among these is the impression that Nigeria must protect its own independence, security and prosperity as it engages with the international community. The centrifugal forces influencing the country's foreign policy include her colonial heritage from the British, the civil war experience, leadership orientation of its heads and the importance of national and economic interests (Mailafiya, 2010; Jega, 2010; Amao and Uzodike, 2015). Other factors shaping the foundations of Nigeria's foreign policy include the vast population of Nigeria, its wealth; and its rich cultural heritage. Nigeria's rich history has been reinforced by a rising population that has made it the world's most populous black country, and by its oil fortunes that make it one of the world's rich countries (Onyearu, 2008; Mohammed, 2010; Ibeanu, 2010).

Foreign policy thinkers, led by Professor Ibrahim Gambari, founded the principle of “concentric circles” as the national policy paradigm between 1983 and 1985. The notion of “Africa as centrepiece” was thought far too common to be of practical significance. Nigeria’s national interest was given top priority in the idea of concentric circles, this was followed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Africa, and the rest of the world (Ajulo 2007; Mailafiya, 2010). The driving force of a state’s foreign policy is the national interest of the state (Ade-Ibijola, 2013; Dan-Fulani, 2014). Although the concept of national interest has remained a matter of intense argument and disagreement among scholars, most of them, however, agree that there are three essential elements of Nigeria’s national interest: the country's self-preservation, the protection and maintenance of the country's independence and the promotion of the people’s economic and social well-being (Folarin, 2010; Fayomi, Chidozie, and Ajayi, 2015; Aluko, 1981 cited in Osaherumwen and Motunrayo, 2017).

Essentially, foreign policy is the primary machinery for the conduct and management of the relationship, which is representative of the people or national interests. Foreign policy is a practical and legislative technique with which a state exploits the resources that are available beyond its territorial boundaries while limiting the consequences (Aleyomi and Bukar, 2017). In the formulation of a foreign policy, therefore, there is need for the policy makers to have rich and accurate information as they stride through the complex and rugged terrain of foreign policy. Akindele (2000: xi) opines that “it is knowledge by decision makers of their country’s capacity and capabilities, knowledge of their country’s strength and weaknesses in relation to those of other countries that must inform the making of a realistic foreign policy”. Taking a retrospective view of policymaking and implementation in Nigeria in the first 40 years of independence, he observed with disquiet and grave concern the stranglehold of the executive and the marginalization of the National Assembly in the management and conduct of Nigeria’s foreign policy. Regrettably, this observation is still true of Nigeria’s foreign policy in the fourth republic.

Against these backgrounds, this study traced the historical and philosophical foundations of Nigeria’s foreign policy engagements since her independence in 1960. It further engages the interaction between regime types and leadership orientation to elucidate Nigeria’s commitment to the Afrocentric foreign policy principle. Essentially, the

study analysed those centripetal and centrifugal forces that have shaped the trajectory of Nigeria's pursuits in the international arena.

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. Within this qualitative framework, an interpretive approach was adopted to give a clearer understanding of the philosophies that have underscored Nigeria's foreign policy manoeuvres over the last 60 years. The study relied mainly on secondary sources of data. The secondary sources include archival materials ranging from Nigerian government official documents, records, academic journals, newspapers, textbooks, conference papers, survey results, reliable and verifiable internet materials. Data gathered were evaluated using content analysis, textual criticism and descriptive-historical analysis. They helped the author to establish trends over a period since the information they convey are collected periodically. Furthermore, the analyses were situated within the purview of the various research questions. These materials threw more light on, and validated the primary data collected during the study.

Historicizing the Foundations of Nigeria's Foreign Policy at Independence

The end of the Second World War in 1945 saw the emergence of two major superpowers – the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) – which drove the international system to metamorphose into a bipolar order. These countries wielded superior military and political power in a hostile manner. On the Western Hemisphere was the US, while the Eastern orbit had the USSR. Several post-war realities gave rise to this situation. First, the Axis powers led by Germany and Japan had been defeated by the Allied Forces. Secondly, although considered as major powers, France and China had been exhausted by the war and their power limited. Likewise, Britain had also been weakened by years of fighting and so could not sustain its superpower status (Bormann, Cragan and Shields, 1996). This scenario triggered a new dimension in international politics as alliances and counter-alliances were formed by the victorious powers. Accordingly, the synergy among the Allied powers, which laid the foundation for the war victory, gave way to an immense ideological rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and their allies. Meredith (2006) submits that

this was the state of global affairs when Nigeria emerged as an independent nation. The ideologically belligerent parties jostled for spheres of influence across the world and newly emerging states were not spared. This conflict was tagged “the Cold War” because it was an ideological battle devoid of physical combat.

Nigeria’s foreign policy principles were first enunciated in a statement made by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria’s first Prime Minister, in August and on October 7th, 1960 respectively. These pronouncements, known as the “Balewa Doctrine,” made the following provisions, which have guided Nigeria’s foreign policy objectives and principles over the years:

- i. “Defense of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nigeria;
- ii. Advancement of economic and social welfare of Nigerians;
- iii. Enhancement of Nigeria’s image and status globally;
- iv. Promotion of unity as well as political, economic social and cultural liberation of Nigeria and Africa;
- v. The promotion of rights of black people and others under colonial rule;
- vi. Promotion of international cooperation, conducive to the consolidation of world peace and security, mutual respect and friendship among all peoples and states;
- vii. Redressing the imbalance in the international power structures which has tended to frustrate the legitimate aspiration of developing countries;
- viii. Respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries; and
- ix. The promotion of world peace based on the principles of freedom, mutual respect and equality of all persons of the world” (Balewa’s Speech at UN Parliament, 7/10/1960).

With this address, Africa was made the centrepiece of Nigeria’s foreign policy, an indication that it was ready to pass through thick and thin to ensure freedom for sister African countries still under the yoke of colonialism and imperial domination. These basic objectives of Nigerian foreign policy have been maintained despite several regime changes (Gambari, 1986; Obiozor, 2007; Ibeanu, 2010; Akinboye, 2013; Dan-Fulani, 2014). Likewise, Section 19(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the

Federal Republic of Nigeria articulates the guiding principles of the country's foreign policy concerns:

1. Commitment to the Principles of Non-Alignment;
2. Respect for the Legal Equality, Political Independence, Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity of all States;
3. Respect for the Principles of Non-Interference in the Affairs of other States;
4. Seeking Membership of International Organizations as a means of promoting functional cooperation, and;
5. Africa as the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy (1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic).

The Africa centrepiece foreign and security policy is predicated on the concept of *Pax Nigeriana*, or the "Nigerian Peace." Coined in 1970 by Bolaji Akinyemi, a former Foreign Affairs Minister, *Pax Nigeriana* was conceived on the belief that Nigeria is the natural, rightful and undisputed hegemon of West Africa and indeed, Africa. By exhibiting leadership and exercising natural hegemony, Nigeria can and ought to provide security and prosperity to the West African sub-region and Africa as a whole. Simply put, *Pax Nigeriana* is an unambiguous statement of Nigeria's pursuit of regional power status and a vital part of its foreign and security policy ethos. *Pax Nigeriana* has become a vocabulary used by the Nigerian government, scholars and diplomats who share a belief in Nigeria's manifest destiny to serve as a "big brother" in Africa (Adebajo, 2008; Amao and Uzodike, 2015; Warner, 2016). For this reason, Nigerian foreign policy and security experts see the country as the Western giant whose manifest destiny is to assist and protect smaller and less privileged neighbours. In comparison to US presence in the Caribbean, scholars have equated *Pax Nigeriana* to Nigeria's version of the Monroe Doctrine (Adebajo, 2008).

Philosophical Foundations of the Key Epochs of Nigeria's Foreign Policy Manoeuvres

The reality of change in the international system has seen the country adapt its policies to identifying and pursuing those options that would maximally foster the country's national interests. With the accepted relation between domestic policies and foreign policy, it is obvious that a vibrant domestic policy will invariably ensure a successful foreign policy

(Lamido, 2000). It is also a truism that when the domestic and foreign policies of any nation are properly harnessed, they will have very positive impacts on her people and their living conditions. Accordingly, Ibeanu (2010) contends that the nuances in Nigeria's foreign policy approach have created three key phases in the historicity of the country's foreign policy pursuit: the conservative, the radical, and the realist phases.

From independence in 1960 to 1970 when the Nigerian civil war ended, the country passed through the conservative phase. Nigeria's perspective on Africa at this period was primarily state-centric and political. Freedom from colonialism, defence of national sovereignty and upholding the principle of non-interference in the domestic concerns of African states were the major characteristics of the first phase. According to Ibeanu (2010:13), "Nigeria's approach to African issues during this period was essentially conservative and pragmatic, while being pro-global stability, which largely implied maintaining existing global power relations." Locally, the delicate nature of the nation-building process and the constant threat of secession were the major factors that influenced this conservative stand (Mbara, Uzodike and Khondlo, 2019). A broader look at the philosophical foundations of these policy epochs will sharpen our understanding.

Conservative Era in Nigeria's Foreign Policy

Nigeria's foreign policy was grounded on the conservative philosophy during the first republic, as it was not premised on the country's colonial experience, neither was the structure and nature of international political system considered. This opinion resonates with the view of Akinboye (2013), when he described Nigeria's foreign policy as timid, ambivalent, docile, indecisive, dissonant and inert. Other critics saw Balewa's foreign policy as conservative, low profile, hesitant and moralistic, bereft of logic and inconsistent (Alkali, 2003; Ibeanu, 2010; Fayomi, Chidozie and Ajayi, 2015). Perhaps this explains why Nigeria at this point became a member of the Monrovia Group, which was moderate and gradual, emphasizing economic cooperation among states from the region than political unity. Balewa loathed sweeping ideologies and regimes, rather, as Fawole (2003:40) maintains, "he was passionate about Africa and African issues to which he gave significant attention".

Nigeria, in the first republic, ran a pro-West foreign policy in favour of Britain, her erstwhile colonial boss and little attention was paid to developing the country economically, politically and socially on the

domestic scene (Jega, 2010). This illustrates the fact that the interest of the common Nigerians was not central to the foreign policies of the first republic. Instead of healing the divisions created among the people by years of colonialism, the chasm was allowed to continue, and this led the various regions of the country progressing with little cohesion at the central government. This culminated in their establishing “regional” consulates abroad (Osaghae, 2002; Ibeanu, 2010; Fayomi et al., 2015). During General Aguiyi Ironsi’s regime, the foreign policy pursued was essentially the same as the Balewa administration’s with very little changes (Ademoyega, 1981; Izah, 1991).

Era of Foreign Policy Radicalism

The end of the civil war in 1970, which saved the country from disintegration, the increase in oil revenues, and the advent of a period of radical military regime (1975-1989) led to a paradigm shift in Nigeria’s foreign policy endeavours from 1970 to 1980. Ideologically, the country’s foreign policy became radical, more pro-active, more activist and assertive, expressing hegemonic ambitions and exerting influence (Akinterinwa, 1999; Adeniji, 2005; Jega, 2010; Dibua, 2013). Nigeria’s standpoint on Africa during this period was basically people-centred and populist. Issues of principal concern were economic liberation, protection of citizens and the establishment of a new world economic order (Ibeanu, 2010). This period saw Nigeria’s military leaders define the country’s foreign policy in terms of its perceived power and leadership aspirations within the continent as exemplified by Generals Murtala Muhammed and Olusegun Obasanjo’s administrations (1975-1979). Besides the power that came with the oil wealth, the ability of the military regimes of the 70s to balance the power in favour of the central government against the regions (states), and the experience of a fratricidal civil war (1967-1970) combined to propel the country’s activist foreign policy thrust (Fayomi, et al., 2015). Consequently, scholars have described the 1970s as the “golden age” of Nigeria’s foreign policy (Garba, 1987; Ade-Ibijola, 2015).

This new radical posture was exemplified in several events. In the first place, Nigeria defied the wishes of her Western allies and their companies operating in the country’s oil sector to become a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1971. This move saw the influence of Western countries on the sector wane and gave more control to the indigenous peoples. Secondly, the

indigenization policy of the federal government, which came into law in 1972, nationalized most expatriate companies' operation in the country controlled by foreigners; Barclays Bank became present day Union Bank and British Petroleum turned to African Petroleum. This was done by the Obasanjo/Shehu Yar'Adua regime (1976-1979). Thirdly, was the proposal by Nigeria for the formation of the OAU African Military joint task force in the same year. This body was to provide military assistance to independent African countries sheltering freedom fighters from Portuguese colonies in case the colonialists attacked the countries. All OAU members will contribute to the sustenance of the military arm (Ibeanu, 2010).

Africa remained the centrepiece of Nigeria's foreign policy, defining her national interest even under the military, subsuming other core objectives like protection and defence of the territorial integrity of the state and encouraging economic development (Jega, 2010). During this period, Nigeria became a frontline state¹ in the liberation movements in Southern Africa especially, apartheid South Africa. As a member of the group, Nigeria gave recognition to the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and in line with the indigenization decree, nationalized the assets of British Petroleum (BP) operating in Nigeria. Ibeanu (2010) observes that Nigeria repeatedly showed leadership on issues bordering on the liberation of Southern Africa from colonial and white supremacist rule because of her financial ability to oppose South Africa. This earned her the chairmanship of the UN Anti-Apartheid Committee (Adeniji, 2005; Akpotor and Agbebaku, 2010). This position of pride and prestige was perhaps more important to the ruling elites in Nigeria than the welfare of her people at home. Nigeria's importance on matters concerning Africa rose so high that no discussion on Africa was complete without Nigeria's contribution (Eze, 2009; Ibeanu, 2010).

On the home front, the radical military government gained acceptance by its promise to return power to a democratically elected government in 1979 and found its foreign policy focus appealing to the people. Besides that, the government also employed the services of intellectuals who had radical dispositions, and these contributed to the successful articulation and execution of the policies at the time. Fayomi et al. (2015) described Nigeria's diplomacy at this period as "naira-spraying diplomacy" whose benevolence was never reciprocated by the

1 Angola, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Mozambique and Zambia constitute the Frontline states formed in 1970 as a harmonious response to fight against apartheid South Africa.

benefitting African states. Buttressing this point, Saliu (2006a) notes with pain that Nigeria's Afrocentric policy lacked the diplomatic principle of reciprocity as obtained elsewhere in the world. He maintains that Nigeria's generosity to African states mostly lacked strategic, economic or political interest as motivation. Global diplomatic practice encourages "give and take" or vice versa in states relation. Scholars agree that Nigeria's Africa-centred policy did not or has not won the country the desired respect and leadership position she deserves as most African beneficiaries often reciprocated her kindness with ingratitude.

Nigeria's Foreign Policy: A Period of Political Wilderness

In 1979, Nigeria returned to civilian rule² under President Shehu Shagari. Foreign policy under Shagari's administration lacked a clear-cut definition as it was seen as a carryover of the Murtala/Obasanjo policy thrust (Ogwu, 1986). This was owing to the lack of interest on the part of most Nigerians which relegated foreign policy issues to the background on the agenda of the presidential candidates (Chidozie, 2014). Some inherent contradictions and inconsistencies in the Africa-centred policy was more evident as the country philandered with the Western and Eastern blocs, despite being non-aligned in principle (Gambari, 2008). Besides the inconsistencies in the Afro-centric policy, worsening domestic conditions and the porous land borders allowed criminals from immediate neighbours (Chad and Cameroon) to violate the country's territorial integrity by attacking, robbing and killing innocent civilians and security operatives (Fawole, 2008; Akinboye, 2013). This was an utter disrespect to the so-called "Giant of Africa" and a slight on the *Pax Nigeriana* principle. The Maitatsine riots in Kano at this period was as a result of poor border control in the country and an anarchic domestic scene (Mbara, et al., 2019). Moreover, successive military administrations prior to Shagari's Presidency exhibited a dearth in leadership and so grossly mismanaged the wealth that came with the oil boom of the 1970s and this dovetailed into a severe economic crisis in the 1980s (Adetula, 2014).

Furthermore, the administration of General Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985) ended the second republic in December 1983. The administration retained Africa as the centrepiece of its foreign policy and attempted to define the limits of the Afrocentric policy. It also pursued

²This was also the country's Second Republic after the First Republic ended with the January 1966 Coup.

national security and economic development as the country sank into economic depression in the early 1980s due to a crash in the price of oil in the international market. The need to strengthen relations with its immediate neighbours was also emphasized as a way of tightening border security (Gambari, 1986). Nonetheless, scholars observe that General Buhari's attempt to improve "good neighbourliness" with his West African brothers ended as a monumental disaster as the country's relationship with its immediate neighbours nosedived. His government expelled nationals of other African countries who had come into Nigeria to seek economic refuge during the years of the oil boom, closed its borders against its neighbours and changed the country's currency; an action which literally wrecked the economy of countless individuals and countries (Ibeanu, 2010; Folarin, 2013; Fayomi et al., 2015).

Ultra-nationalism and xenophobia characterized the country's foreign policy at this period, and it signalled the beginning of isolationism in Africa (Adeniji, 2005; Akinboye, 2013; Amao and Uzodike, 2015). This twist in General Buhari's foreign policy thrust was rationalized by the administration on the grounds that the actions were aimed towards saving the economy from total collapse, tackle corruption and improve the welfare of its citizens (Folarin, 2010). It was under this same administration that Alhaji Umaru Dikko was smuggled into the country in a crate from London to face charges of corruption; a situation that worsened the already tense relations with Nigeria's erstwhile colonial masters. These diplomatic miscalculations battered the country's relationship with its West African neighbours and cast doubts on its leadership claim.

Transition to Economic Diplomacy

On August 27, 1985, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida assumed power as Nigeria's first military president after a palace coup that ousted General Buhari's regime. Babangida did not hide his aversion for both the domestic and foreign policies of his boss as they portrayed the country in very bad light in the international community and set her against its neighbours. Babangida questioned the philosophical foundations of the country's foreign policy which he described as inconsistent and shrouded in ambiguities, making it difficult for other countries to relate with Nigeria on matters of ideological affinities (Saliu, 2006b). Consequently, Babangida's regime set out to heal the injuries inflicted on Nigeria's foreign policy by his predecessor. The country's

poor relations with the West was improved as it re-established relations with Britain and the IMF loan logjam was resolved. Likewise, the country's borders were reopened to the admiration of its West African neighbours (Saliu, 2006b; Amao and Uzodike, 2015). Babangida's reputation among the West African sister states soared as he extended pecuniary assistance to them, a move which won him the chairmanship of ECOWAS on three consecutive occasions.

In addition, this period saw Nigeria's foreign policy activities drift towards sub-regional peacekeeping and "economic diplomacy" on the global scene. Armed conflicts and civil unrest in the West African sub-region increased Nigeria's concerns for her territorial integrity, sovereignty and the fear of a spill-over effect to rest of the region (Jega, 2010). Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire were engulfed in military conflicts that threatened the principle of good neighbourliness and increased the fear of refugees threatening the other countries within the sub-region. Despite the economic crisis on the domestic scene, Nigeria sustained peacekeeping operations in these countries at an enormous cost to the country (Folarin, 2013). Nigeria's international profile increased as it conducted her foreign policy with prestige but at the expense of its own citizens. Warner (2016: 11) describes this as Nigeria's projection of illusory hegemony where the would-be hegemons pursue such a policy within their external environments. In the case of Nigeria, he notes that "the employment of such a strategy is also undertaken to bolster elites' positions within the domestic Nigerian government as well."

Similarly, the concept of "economic diplomacy" was introduced into Nigeria's foreign policy as a way of ameliorating the negative consequence of the economic depression experienced in the country during the 1980s, which was triggered by the fall in oil revenue. This new foreign policy stance aimed to mitigate the impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced to save the economy from collapse. Along with this was the authoritarian regime of General Buhari which came with some harsh economic policies that had disastrous consequences both locally and within the sub-region. There was a redirection of foreign policy from a primarily political enterprise to an economic one that is aimed at using foreign policy to advance domestic economic development goals (Ogwu and Olukoshi, 1991; Asobie and Ibeanu, 2005).

In 1986, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, a former minister of external affairs, proposed a repositioning of Nigeria's foreign policy away from

the cardinal areas of decolonization and the defeat of apartheid to economic development. He noted that the survival of Nigeria as a nation, the welfare of her citizens, and Nigeria's leadership role in Africa were of equal importance in the country's national interest (Asobie, 1991). Thus, Nigeria abandoned some of its traditional interest in Africa and increasingly pursued the friendship of former enemies of its global citizenship. "Economic diplomacy" launched in 1988 was to help Nigeria strengthen relations with development partners, attract foreign direct investment (FDI), achieve debt cancellation/forgiveness and to get economic development assistance from global institutions on both bilateral and multilateral levels (Jega, 2010). Ibeanu described this era as the "realist" phase of Nigeria's foreign policy (2010).

Through the years, economic diplomacy has been a part of Nigeria's foreign policy thrust and diplomacy, but in the 1980s, it was made a cardinal focus of the foreign policy. It was within this background that Nigeria played her role in the transformation of OAU into AU. Nevertheless, the crippling economic crisis which began in the late 1970s and reached its crescendo during the second republic (1979-1983) provides a broader context. The new focus of building Africa's unity on economic integration appealed to Nigeria's government due to the economic quagmire it found herself. Thus, Babangida's strategy was to realign Nigeria's foreign policy to emphasize pro-Western content and de-emphasize the radical posture of the 1970s. General Ike Nwachukwu, the then-external affairs minister, addressing Nigerian Ambassadors in 1991 captures the strategy succinctly:

In your utterances and in your behavioural pattern, please remember that Nigeria is a developing country. It needs support from the international community and that support can only come when you can win the confidence of those whose support you seek... You begin to win that confidence through friendliness and loyalty to their cause. What matters is your ability to win for Nigeria what we cannot for ourselves, that is, the economic well-being of our people and physical well-being of Nigeria (Ogwu and Olukoshi, 1991: 6).

However, Nigeria's foreign policy under General Babangida was mired in confusion and ambiguities which led to indiscriminate changes of ministers of external affairs (Osaghae, 2002). Besides, Nigeria is a secular state and a multi-religious society which recognizes Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR). Nevertheless, the regime's attempt to mix religion with foreign policy was a blunder and an

expression of the level of confusion that characterized the administration's foreign policy endeavour. In 1987, Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) became contentious when General Babangida changed the country's status from that of an observer to a full member without recourse to domestic and global considerations. Scholars maintain that the negative impact of this diplomatic move is still felt in the country till date (Fawole, 2012; Fayomi et al., 2015). To make matters worse, the administration kept changing the dates and rules of the transition programme, and that battered the gains made in foreign policy and earned General IBB the name "Maradona"³ (Akinboye, 2013).

Return to Foreign Policy Isolationism and Democratic Rule

The annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election—considered the freest and fairest in the country's history—by General Ibrahim Babangida was the climax of how the will of the people was constantly subverted by his regime. On August 26th, 1993, Babangida stepped aside and an interim national government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan was put in place to head the ill-fated Third Republic. Conversely, on November 14 of the same year, Shonekan was forced out of office by General Sani Abacha. Fawole (2002) describes Abacha's foreign policy as radical, combative and defensive; an "area boy diplomacy" which was premised on the principle of retaliation to counter the antagonistic domestic and foreign environment it was born into. Abacha maintained a hostile and independent stance that was anti-West and abolished all liberation policies. Consequently, the West encouraged and sponsored opposition groups within and outside the country and even made utterances that amounted to interference with the country's domestic affairs. The National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) was formed in 1994, by progressives in the country who were critical of the activities of the Abacha regime. Nigeria's relations with the West reached its lowest ebb when the environmental activist and playwright, Ken Saro Wiwa, was hung on November 10, 1995 along with eight other activists by the Abacha regime (Folarin, 2013). This action led to the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth and many Western countries severed

³ Maradona is the legendary Argentinian footballer who was known for his dribbling skills. General Babangida was likened to this footballer because of his perceived insincerity of his policies and transition programme which saw the goal post shifted severally to aggrandize his selfish interest.

their ties with the country, making her a pariah state. This era is tagged “Nigeria’s era of foreign policy isolationism” (Amao and Uzodike, 2015; Lawal and Aluko, 2016).

Notwithstanding the international attacks on the administration of General Abacha, some scholars have lauded its ability to confuse the West in its policies by hobnobbing with Asian countries and anti-Western states, a move the West did not have a policy response to (Saliu, 2006d; Fayomi et al., 2015). In sum, Nigeria’s foreign policy under Abacha was circumstantial, aimed at coping with the fragmented domestic and foreign environment it was born into. General Sani Abacha mysteriously died in office, on June 8, 1998 and was succeeded by General Abdulsalam Abubakar who commenced a ten-month transition programme that culminated in the handing over of power to a democratically elected government headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999. During the brief reign of General Abubakar, Nigeria’s ties with USA and the West was restored, political prisoners were freed, and Nigeria was once again welcomed into the international community. At the dawn of the Fourth Republic, the configuration of the country’s internal security had significantly changed with new challenges besetting it. Increasingly, domestic conditions affected the conduct of international relations during this era. Hence, this necessitated a new approach to conducting foreign policy (Alao, 2011; Folarin, 2013). Globalization, which saw states cede some degree of their sovereignty to new players in the international economic system, also played a role in changing the approach to the conduct of foreign policy in Nigeria (Okolie, 2010).

Moreover, diplomacy in this era differed from what obtained in previous decades in the sense that sub-regional and continental considerations were de-emphasized to the benefit of domestic interests and global policies (Folarin, 2013). This was necessary because many Nigerians believed that the country’s generosity and sacrifice at the sub-regional and regional levels had not been given the recognition it deserved. Others also believed that the practice of Nigeria confronting major powers on African issues should be replaced with actions that will benefit the country’s national interest (Alao, 2011). This position was corroborated by Akinterinwa (2004) when he noted that President Obasanjo’s diplomacy represented a paradigm shift from the Afrocentric to a global policy thrust. He notes that Nigeria’s foreign policy was politically centred on Africa but economically global-centred. The harsh economic reality in the country at the time, coupled with the high debt

profile, required a change in policy tactics which emphasized economic diplomacy over political considerations. Alao (2011) sums the discussion by submitting that Nigeria's foreign policy under the Obasanjo era was a delicate balance between its traditional role within the sub-region and the region, and the need to strengthen its relations with the global powers in order to find support in handling its domestic problems. Nigerian people and anything Nigeria were the focus of the administration's foreign policy (Akinterinwa, 2004). To achieve his foreign policy objectives, President Olusegun Obasanjo embarked on what was described as "shuttle diplomacy" which earned him the title of Nigeria's most travelled president (Saliu, 2006c; Okolie, 2010). Buttressing this claim, Babalola observes that President Obasanjo undertook 113 foreign trips between 1999 and 2003 (Omotola and Saliu, 2005).

In addition, the emergence of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) climaxed the transition from the radical period in Nigeria's foreign policy, centred on decolonization and ending apartheid, to economic development of the country. Successive Nigerian leaders have continuously played critical roles in the advancement of African integration and economic development (Nuamah, 2003). Nigeria rejected the proposal by Muammar Ghaddafi to replace the OAU with continental institutions that include a common African presidency, a single parliament, army and central bank for the entire continent which will eliminate boundaries and state sovereignties. This idealistic notion of a United States of Africa by Ghaddafi opposed Nigeria's pragmatic and realistic African Union. Nigeria's stance on the establishment of the AU resonates with the moderate posture it took when the OAU was formed in 1963 (Wapmuk, 2013).

Nigeria's citizen-centred diplomacy

It was perhaps in response to Nigeria's illusory claim to hegemony on the African continent and the image crisis the country was grappling with that Prof Dora Akunyili, Nigeria's former minister of information and culture, launched a rebranding campaign. Along with this came the need to reposition the country's foreign policy (Amao and Uzodike, 2015). These two areas were given priority by the Yar'Adua's administration who believed that addressing the socio-economic and political problems in the country was a critical necessity. The late Umar Musa Yar'Adua succeeded President Obasanjo and introduced the concept of "citizen

diplomacy” as the focus of Nigeria’s foreign policy (Folarin, 2011). This diplomacy thrust was continued by the Goodluck Jonathan administration (Amao and Uzodike, 2015).

The concept of citizen diplomacy originated from the United States and it defines the sacrosanct defence of the citizen’s interest and welfare and represents the essence of domestic or foreign policy of any nation (Folarin, 2011; Aleyomi and Bakar, 2017). In an atmosphere of competing foreign desires and belligerence, it is the application of intelligence and tact. Maduekwe (2009:8) maintains that citizen diplomacy “is diplomacy conducted at the behest of and the benefit of the people, the true custodians of sovereignty. ...is a foreign policy initiative that will be citizen-oriented in its approach, objective and outcome.” Aleyomi and Bakar (2017) contend that citizen diplomacy is as old as Nigeria’ diplomatic antecedent. It re-emphasizes Nigeria’s external ties that would clearly benefit the interest of Nigerians and advance their perceptible participation in the diplomatic climate, regardless of where they live across the globe. Essentially, citizens are critical stakeholders and are the first beneficiaries of any international engagement that Nigeria embarks on in its concentric foreign policy (Agbu, 2015; Mbara, Gopal, Uzodike and Khondlo, 2020).

Citizen diplomacy, according to Agbu (2009) and Egwemi and Ochim (2016), is a political construct that implies the involvement of the average citizens of a country, directly or indirectly, in the formulation and implementation of foreign policies. This they describe as “track two diplomacy” and it involves informal interaction between citizens of different states, as opposed to official interaction between government officials. Okocha and Onwuka (2007) declare that citizen diplomacy aims to “protect” the image, integrity and interest of Nigeria and Nigerians, and at the same time, retaliating against every act of hostility meted out on Nigerians or to the Nigerian cause, not forgetting those who delight in branding the country as corrupt. It involves making Nigerians at home and abroad the centre of the country’s foreign policy. This new policy thrust represents a paradigm shift away from the Africa-centred foreign policy direction.

The internal inconsistencies in Nigeria have exacerbated the ill-treatment and identity crisis suffered by the citizens, which contradicts the push of citizen diplomacy. Bad political leadership, corruption, lack of national cohesion, security problems, electoral malpractices, poverty, worsening unemployment, deteriorating economy, and the effects of globalization on the country have all combined to aggravate the challenge

of citizen diplomacy and image crisis in Nigeria (Mbara, 2019; Mbara, et al., 2020). In certain situations, the ill treatment of Nigerians is ludicrous and inexplicable. The global hatred and disrespect for the nation and its people cannot be separated from the image crisis. Nigerians are being brutalised and maltreated in many African countries who previously benefitted from the country's magnanimity during its Africa-first policy era. For example, the continued xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa, Ghana, Libya and other African countries (Mbara, et al., 2020). Across the world, the ill treatment of Nigerians seems to have become a norm since the government of the country lacks the political will to retaliate. This does not imply that Nigerians are unwanted people across the world, but it goes to show the ineffectiveness of citizen diplomacy.

President Buhari predicated his campaign promises on three essential points: combating terrorism, fighting corruption, and economic improvement. These may be intrinsically linked to the citizen diplomacy (Mbara, 2018). Under President Buhari's government, foreign policy has centred on improving relations with its neighbours in order to jointly fight against Boko Haram, which assumed a regional or transnational dimension, partnering with the US and other world powers to support the government in the fight against terrorism by providing the necessary manpower and intelligence, economic improvement and the fight against corruption, and improved relations with China in order to foster economic development by providing the necessary infrastructure (Bello, Dutse and Othman, 2017). Buhari's foreign policy predisposition may have been influenced by three plausible reasons, "the desire to engender a new and robust foreign policy thrust; the desire to revitalize Nigeria's stalled foreign policy impetus; and the desire to sustain the past and renowned foreign policy glory by hands-on engagement" (Obaze, 2016:1). Buhari's foreign policy conduct evokes power, dedication and priority.

Summarizing the discourse on Nigeria's Afrocentric policy since independence, Ibeanu (2010:31) avers that:

Nigeria's foreign policy in Africa has shown both continuities and discontinuities. Among the consistencies is the country's unalloyed focus on Africa. In this regard, decolonization, African unity and economic development have been central. As a good state-citizen of Africa, Nigeria has often seen its own freedom, unity and economic progress as intrinsically tied to Africa's. However, while the themes of freedom, unity and economic development have been consistent, there

have been clear discontinuities in Nigeria's interpretation of its goals, philosophies and strategies for achieving these within the African context.

Conclusion

Nigeria's foreign policy objective over the years has been geared towards promoting African integration and support for African unity which has been taken seriously by successive Nigerian governments. Through pragmatic realism in the pursuit of African unity, Nigeria demonstrated her commitment to the objective in the role she played in the establishment of the OAU in 1963 and later the transformation of the organisation to the AU in 2002. Despite the consistency in Nigerian foreign policy over the years, some nuances can be observed which were elicited by some domestic and external factors. These factors have affected Nigeria's tactics and approach to African affairs over time.

However, the preceding discussion also shows that Nigeria's foreign policy manoeuvres over the years are theoretically lame and lacking in direction as each regime captioned their policy with an appealing phrase with no significant philosophical distinction from the former. The focus remains constant: Africa and the senseless generosity to sister countries. Most supervising heads coin concepts that have no meaning or relevance in international relations and foreign policy articulation. As Nigeria pursued a busybody foreign policy, other countries with similar power base refused the temptation of extraterritorial activism within the region or elsewhere and chose to consolidate their power base for the greater good of their people. At independence, countries like Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal had reasonably stable economies but chose to pursue foreign policies that would benefit their people through the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Although the Nigerian government has embarked on the protection of their people through the citizen diplomacy, the style, theory and effectiveness in implementation remain blurry. It is pertinent to note that both the domestic and external environments are involved in diplomacy, and both are complementary in nature. In an ideal setting, citizen diplomacy will help in galvanizing the domestic climate, which does not seem to be enthusiastic about the policy thrusts. In Nigeria, not much of foreign policy issues of interest are in the public domain as against the cardinal concept of citizen diplomacy which seeks to benefit the citizens who are the real custodians of sovereignty.

In an increasingly globalised world, it is hoped that Nigeria's citizen diplomacy will be an invaluable instrument for national development of the country and for a positive image building. Through citizen diplomacy, the government and masses can work in synergy to mitigate the political, security and ethnic tensions in that have bedevilled the country over the years and provide a sustainable means of survival for Nigerians at home and abroad. This will also help in solving the image problem.

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